

THE TAGG FILE

NAME: ALFRED McCOY

OCCUPATION: AUTHOR

by John Stapleton

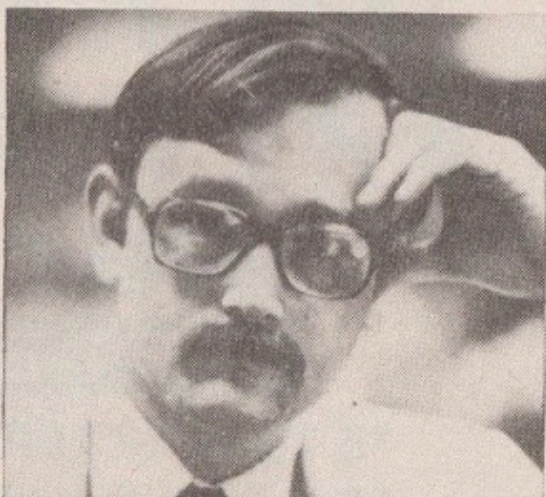
Alfred McCoy is the author of two books - *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, and the recently published *Drug Traffic - Narcotics and Organised Crime in Australia* (Harper and Row - 450 pages - paperback - \$10). He spoke to John Stapleton last week about a wide range of topics related to drug traffic.

JS: Have you had any legal problems with the book?

AM: Some. We're the subject of five legal interventions, two cases now before the courts. Both of which I'm fairly confident about winning.

JS: Did you have any legal problems with *The Politics of Heroin*?

AM: No, but there were a lot of other kinds of problems. The CIA tried to kill me. They audited my income tax even though my income then was about \$3,000 a year. My Federal Education Grant was subjected to review. All my major sources were threatened with death unless they retracted. The thesis of that book is that the CIA was complicitous in the



heroin traffic with special reference to the Golden Triangle of Laos where their most serious level of complicity was the carrying of the heroin on air-

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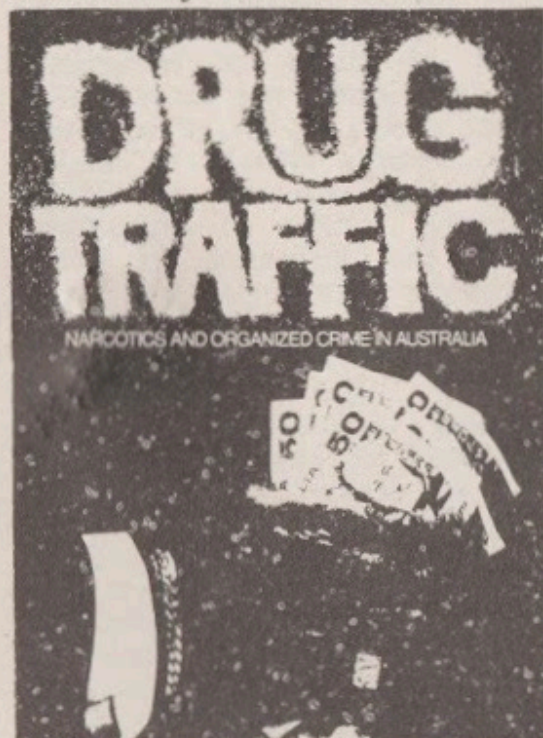
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craft belonging to Air America.

JS: *It interests me that in your books you deal fairly perfunctorily with the accepted reasons for drug abuse, such as disillusionment with sociological values, high unemployment etc. Why is that?*

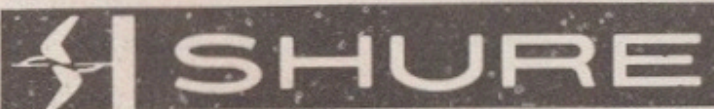
AM: If you were writing a book about the liquor industry in NSW, you would want to know how they manufacture it, how they licence it, distribute it, what the relationships are with unions, the whole struggle over opening and closing hours... the economics. Why people drink is not really a question. I don't really think you can understand why people drink unless you understand about the advertising, the marketing, the industry behind it. People become alcoholics because it is available. Why do people become Vincents abusers? Because it's advertised at them, pushed at them. There are a whole broad spectrum of people who have certain types of problems and if you get the drug that alleviates the problem then people will use it. That's not an issue. In terms of drug abuse, the whole analysis of the problem has been on why people use drugs, shock horror Johnny uses drugs. 20 year olds are

now using heroin, My God, horror, horror, horror. These are valid concerns but supposing heroin didn't exist as a commodity, supposing it wasn't on the street, then you wouldn't have a drug problem. 10 years ago Australia had almost no heroin problem. 5 years ago it only had a very small problem, now it has a substantial heroin problem. Have Australians changed that much in 5 years?



JS: *I was interested in you saying that Australians have*

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been heavy users of chemicals for over a century, we were the leading consumers of patent medicines in the 1890's for instance. Is that because we're a repressed society?

AM: Every society is a repressed society. Societies by their very nature are collectives which infringe upon the individual, they are by nature repressive. Every kind of society has certain kinds of drugs or inebriants that individuals use to let off a bit of steam. A lot of societies have certain rituals in which people are allowed to adopt different kinds of behaviour under the influence of those inebriants. Narcotics are very much a part of the emergence of the modern pharmaceutical industry. The pharmaceutical industry in Australian context exploited all kinds of mechanisms to make high level drug taking acceptable.

JS: *I was wondering if you see any relationship between the decline of the highly idealistic movement associated with the late sixties early seventies with consumption of grass and LSD.*

AM: It's much more a marketing question than a cultural question. After the death of Donald McKay in July 1977, there was a massive nationwide crackdown on domestic cultivation of cannabis and also a nationwide crackdown on importation of cannabis. They applied pressure on the system thinking that it would force the systems collapse. It didn't. What happened was that: First of all the idealists, as you call them, the casual marijuana dealers who bought a bit and sold a bit, gave a bit away, smoked among their friends. . . . tended to get out. Particularly when the

word came down, no grass but we've got smack. People who didn't want to handle heroin quit the trade and moved on to other things. The people who stayed were professional criminal syndicates operating in the cannabis trade at larger levels. Also there was a whole new type of petty crim, standover thug, the usual urban heavies that moved quite substantially into drug dealing. You saw then a shift in the social spectrum of drug dealers towards the criminal. With the increased repression and increased customs checks there's a market force which in terms of smuggling pushes things towards heroin. In smuggling bulk is the key question. Heroin is highly compact. The eradication of domestic cannabis consumption means that the whole market is more dependent on imported products.

JS: *I noticed amongst my contemporaries, a shift from marijuana into mandrax.*

AM: You get polydrug use now. Heroin is expensive. So called heroin addicts in fact have a erratic pattern of use. It's as much determined by their economic fortunes as their liking for various drugs. Serious levels of unemployment is only a few years old. High levels of heroin use is only a few years old.

JS: *Funny when being unemployed means having no money.*

AM: Not no money, limited money. It's a question of people with a lot of time, they're bored, they want a buzz. The idealised picture of the mainlining junky getting his/her dose once or twice a day for year upon year is completely fal-

acious. There are very few people who conform to that image. What you have is a spectrum of dealers and users who are all the way from occasional to fulltime. The phenomenon of heroin abuse mixed up with other drugs is now shifting from its home in the more affluent suburbs, apart from the Kings Cross area which is more of a ghetto phenomena. In the last two or three years, particularly since the McKay killing, it has expanded West into working class suburbs where by all accounts a high level of drug use is settling in amongst the unemployed. They're an ideal target. Heroin's only virtue as a drug is that it narcotises you, it makes you insensitive to a strong physical or emotional sensations. It's chief virtue is to wrap you into a timeless cocoon. If you're unemployed and bored, it makes time go.

JS: *Isn't it also pleasurable; as an opium derivative isn't there some of the Kublai Khan in it?*

AM: In Asia if you're a man of 25 and you're an opium user, you're considered a pariah; you will never marry, you'll never be treated seriously. You're simply written off in social terms, even amongst the hill tribes that grow it. The tolerance of drug use is reserved for those people who have had it, the old people fifty or above. Why do you have people who are in their physical, mental, sexual prime being involved in a drug who's only virtue is to dull all of those sensations?

JS: *How do you feel about people who use drugs?*

AM: This is not a book about users. In the United States you have currently between half and one million people currently

using heroin and several million past users. Is it because they all have dependent personalities? What is a dependent personality? Heroin is used because it is available. In Australia, you're close to the source, purity is 27% in comparison to New York's 3-6%, supply is constant. In the five or six years of high level usage there has never been a 'drought'. There is no pressure on the system for a number of reasons. To put pressure on the system requires enormous allocation of enforcement manpower which is not available. There are more American Narcotic enforcement officers in a precinct in central Harlem than there are in the whole of NSW.

JS: *How do you think organised crime will develop in the future?*

AM: Take the Nugan Head Bank collapse. That's an investigation which is going to show how it became so large so quickly. As organised crime boomed in the seventies, there was the need for a loaning institution. It was one thing to make money out of SP booking, but then how do you move that money into the financial system so that you can use it in Australia, you've got to go overseas and come back, places like Hong Kong, Singapore or Switzerland where you can put it through a bank account and send it back down again. Whether that involves importing cane furniture, which a lot of professional criminals in Australia are involved in. The Nugan Head Bank was merchant banking to the shadow world. You could say Nugan Heads proper advertisement; they proudly style themselves in their advertisement as: 'The Nugan Head international group provides personalised professional services for corporations, institutions and business people.'

That ad might have been better phrased: 'The Nugan Head international group, merchandisers to the shadow world, provides personalised professional services for SP bookmakers, heroin importers, and corrupt corporative executives. Money laundering our speciality'. People are now aware that organised crime is a force in our society.

JS: *What sort of reaction have you had to people like the police from a book like yours?*

AM: It was not long ago that we had a Police Commissioner in this state that denied that organised crime existed. A couple of steps below that however with people like the Crime Intelligence Unit, they are generally very supportive because it gives them another string in their bow. They are ready to expand but need political support. The corrupt officers that are making a fortune out of organised crime don't ring me up and complain.

JS: *Anything you want to add?*

AM: One of the groups that

has been actively concerned about organised crime is the entertainment world. Be they musicians, actors, entertainers, they have been seriously concerned about organised crime for at least a decade now. Leagues clubs, nightclubs, all those places are fronts for organised crime activities. If you go on strike an organised crime heavy is going to break your legs. Who wants to live and work in a world of gangsters, thuggery, . . . these people are not equal opportunity employers. They are not keen on unionisation. They don't favour paying a fair days pay for a fair days work. Anybody involved in entertainment or the popular side of the music industry is aware of this.

JS: *Is it an unfightable type of thing?*

AM: Australia is still a small and manageable enough community to make this possible, but I doubt if anything will be done. It's in the too hard basket.

MISSED DISCS

by Al Wayman.

Remember when every town hall, RSL, or Mechanics Inst., had a 'dance' every week? When bands were popping out of the walls? When EVERYONE was in a band? When there were lunchtime gigs in Bourke St.? When bands worked three gigs a night? (eg., Dandenong Town Hall, Ormond RSL, then the city). When every band was called 'The'?

Well, Glenn A Baker does. And he put together some albums to celebrate those crazy early days of Australian rock.

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These five albums aren't a definitive history, but they give incredible insight into the origins of the Australian rock industry. From these frail beginnings. . .

There's just too much good stuff on these records to name tracks, but if you are at all interested in how it all happened way back when, you have to check out these albums.

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